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Social Foundations of Education: Community Study Assignment

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Social Foundations of Education Community Study Assignment

Through this project, you will be asked to learn about your students' community – i.e., the “social contexts” of school – through the following four exercises, to be carried out over the next four weeks of classes. Each student will be placed in a small working group and, in turn, each working group will be assigned a Title One elementary school and its community on the North Shore of Staten Island for study. (Because an elementary school is zoned, its community is geographically bounded and therefore a bit easier, for our purposes, to study).

Each week, your group will complete and submit one part of the assignment for feedback. In the final week, you will submit a portfolio (with the revised products from the first three assignments), post your group slide presentation, and hand in your individual reflection.

1. Preparatory Information Gathering (Week One)

In preparation for your Community Walk, research the/a community where your students live. Draw on public sources of information – including news articles, census data (available via Social Explorer, for example), government or other useful websites, i.e., the [Endangered Language Alliance Map](#), for example – to learn about the community and its character.

- What kinds of stories appear about this community in the local newspaper?
- What is the racial, ethnic, and linguistic make-up of the neighborhood?
 - o Are members of the community American citizens? Immigrants? Undocumented?
 - o Has/how has the population of this neighborhood changed over the last 50 years?
- What is the income status of the community (i.e., poverty level?)
- What household types do you find? Owner occupied or renter occupied?
- What is the level of education in the community?
- How safe is the community – what can you find out about crime in the neighborhood? Consider perceptions and actual crime data.
- What is the health of the community populace?
 - o Are there any particular health issues? Environmental issues that contribute to poor health?

Print copies of tables or maps that you find to put in your project portfolio. Collect and deposit artifacts of data into your group folder.

2. Community Walk (Week Two)

Wearing a mask and keeping social distance, explore your assigned neighborhood in person. You may take photos of people or places you find significant. Do not just drive through the community – make an effort to get out of the car (or off the bus/train). Be present – and be a detailed, careful observer.

Chart your journey into the neighborhood. Be sure to walk through both commercial and residential areas. Create a map of how you got here and any landmarks you passed. Note what the neighborhood looks like.

- What kind of buildings do you see? Are there mostly apartment buildings and complexes, housing projects, single-family houses, or tenements?
 - o What do you notice about the properties: are they newly renovated or old and rundown? Are they well maintained? Is there graffiti on the walls, fences, or sidewalks? Is it art or vandalism?
 - o Are there boards or bars on the windows?
- Do you see benches, streetlights, parking meters, garbage cans, or anything else on or near the sidewalks?
- What kind of shops do you see? Are they open? Are there vacant storefronts? Do stores appear to be recently closed--possibly due to Covid-19?
 - o Do you see Laundromats or dry cleaners? Are there banks or mostly check cashing establishments? Do you find small superettes or delis, or is there a grocery store nearby?
- Do you see any public spaces? Are there green areas? Are there recreational spaces for children/teens?
- Do you see people walking on the street? What race and gender? Families or individuals? Are there bus or train/subway stops nearby?
- What kind of public buildings do you see – is there a library nearby? A police station? Fire station? Hospital or health clinic?

Collect artifacts (brochures, fliers, or business cards, for example) on your walk. If none are available, you may document via photographs.

Optional: Informal interview. Engage at least three people you see in casual conversation. Why are they there? Do they shop/eat/come here often? What do they like/not like about this place? What do they think of the local school?

Collect and deposit artifacts of data into your group folder.

3. Needs & Resources Inventory (Week Three)

Looking across the data you have collected, what you have observed, and the [CCCNYS North Shore Report](#), begin to summarize the *needs* of the community as well as the *resources* in the community.

Needs: What do you see as some of the challenges of this area? Are there particular health problems that require special programs? Is there a large geriatric or juvenile population that may require particular services? Are there economic or housing challenges that need intervention?

Resources:

What do you see as some resources or areas of strength in the community? Are there churches? (Do the churches offer a food pantry or serve free meals?) Civic associations? Community-based organizations (i.e., Project Hospitality, Make the Road, etc.)? Are there health clinics? Educational enrichment opportunities?

Are there sports or activities available to children?

Can you find evidence of cultural organizations in the neighborhood – i.e., zoos, museums, institutions of higher education?

Are there employment agencies or job training centers? Are there businesses that have a stake in the neighborhood?

Who are the political representatives for this neighborhood?

Present your inventory in a clear, detailed graphic or chart; deposit chart into your group folder.

4. Summary and Reflection (Week Four)

- a. In your group: Drawing from all of your data, create a 6-8 slide presentation that characterizes the community you studied. Post in the online gallery. Review and comment on at least two other presentations.
- b. On your own: Reflect on all that you have learned and understood through the process of working in your group to explore your school community and from the presentations of other groups. Draft a 3-5 page essay that responds to the following:
 - o What social context factors do you believe may affect students in the community you studied and their ability to learn? In what ways?
 - o How might a teacher use this information to make schooling for children in this community more effective?
 - o What did you learn about yourself as a person and prospective teacher from working with your group and doing this project?